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FOR AF, AF/W, AND AF/PD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/09/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [GA](#)

SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: EMBASSY CABLE ABOUT BOGUS CONGRESSMAN
IN PUBLIC DOMAIN

REF: 04 BANJUL 430

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (D)

11. (U) Reftel -- text contained in para 4 -- reported the June 2004 visit to The Gambia by a private American business consultant, Richard T. Hines, who evidently passed himself off to the GOTG as a member of the U.S. Congress. Reftel also reported Embassy's efforts to clarify Hines' status with the GOTG.

12. (U) Reftel was unclassified and its verbatim text is now in the public domain. New York Times reporter Barry Meier e-mailed a copy of reftel to the Embassy and asked that we confirm its authenticity. Ambassador responded that Embassy had no comment, either on authenticity or otherwise. We note that an online "journal" known for its anti-GOTG stance, "AllGambian.net," has also carried the text.

13. (C) COMMENT: Reftel, which predates the current Embassy team, is potentially embarrassing to The GOTG, which was seemingly hoodwinked by Hines. We think it likely that "AllGambian.net" featured the text in an effort to score points against the GOTG. So far, we have picked up no reaction here to reftel's surfacing publicly. END COMMENT.

14. (U) BEGIN TEXT OF REFTEL:
SUMMARY

11. Over the last week, Post has been engaged in damage control following the visit of an independent American consultant who passed himself off to high ranking Gambian officials as a US Congressman. The fallout may be the negative reception of potential US investment in the desperately needed airline sector, but Post is doing all it can to see that does not happen. END SUMMARY.
CONGRESSMAN IN TOWN?

12. On Friday, June 18, 2004, a contact alerted Poloff Daniel Renna that there was a business consultant in The Gambia introducing himself as a US Congressman. Poloff informed CDA who insisted that the story be confirmed or denied by AF/W. An hour Later, AF/W confirmed that no Representatives or Senators were currently in The Gambia.

13. On Saturday, June 19, CDA attended a celebration at President Jammeh's village and was shocked when President Jammeh entered the dining room flanked by a man announced as "U.S. Congressman" Richard T. Hines. Hines sat next to the President at the head table of the gathering of some 700 guests. Hines then handed President Jammeh a pin, as a pronouncement was made that the "Congressman" had just awarded President Jammeh a medal from the 82nd Airborne Division.

14. Later at the dinner when Hines was introduced to CDA as the Congressman, CDA began to inquire of the veracity of his title and as to why she had not been informed of his visit to The Gambia. Hines suggested that he and CDA meet for breakfast Monday morning to discuss the matter.

THE TRUTH FINALLY COMES OUT

¶5. On Monday, June 21, CDA and Poloff met Hines and his business associates at the Kairaba Hotel for breakfast. Hines acknowledged immediately that there had been a misunderstanding. He explained that he was a private international business consultant hired by World Air Leasing, whose CEO, C. Edward Creed, was one of the business partners at the table. He admitted that he had given President Jammeh a gift of a lapel pin with the 82nd airborne insignia that he happened to have had with him at the time. In no way, Hines explained, had he intended to pass himself off as someone he was not. However, he also admitted that he had stepped on some sensitive toes when he had quipped to President Jammeh that The Gambia's oil prospects were "only propaganda." CDA and Poloff explained the role of the Embassy in relations between the U.S. and The Gambia, and expressed their displeasure at being the last ones to know of his presence in the country.

¶6. CDA cautioned Hines and his associates against their plans to travel overland to Dakar that evening and handed Hines a copy of Post's most recent Consular Information Sheet. She further instructed Post's travel office to make reservations for all three men to travel by air to Dakar that evening. After a meeting at the Embassy to discuss World Air Leasing's legitimate business plans for starting up an airline in The Gambia (to be reported septel), Hines, Creed, and their Gambian partner Abu Kalley, returned to their hotel and departed the country on schedule.

¶7. On Wednesday, June 23, Post received a copy of The Gambia Daily, the Government paper and The Gambia's newspaper of record, for Monday, June 21, carrying the banner headline, "President Jammeh receives U.S. award for fight against terrorism." The text of the first paragraph of the article is reproduced below. The remainder of the article does not mention Hines at all.

Begin text

"A US Congressman, Richard T. Hines, has on behalf of President George Bush presented President Yahya Jammeh with an award acknowledging his courage and truth in the fight against terrorism. The ceremony took place during President Jammeh's visit to Bakau last Thursday, the final day of his Dialogue with The People tour." End of Text

DAMAGE CONTROL

¶8. CDA asked to meet Mambury Njie, Permanent Secretary, Office of the President to explain the situation. During a thirty-minute CDA told Njie what Hines had told her. CDA reported that Hines had subsequently clarified that his claim to be a Congressman had been a misunderstanding on the part of the Gambian government; nevertheless, he had had ample opportunity to clear up the misconception and had failed to do so. Given Hines' association with World Air Leasing, CDA was concerned that this internationally recognized commercial aircraft leasing company might not be evaluated on its own merits, and recommended that the company be allowed to continue its negotiations with the Gambian Civil Aviation Authority. CDA further suggested that Hines, however, should not be part of any future negotiations between World Air Leasing and Gambian officials.

¶9. Permanent Secretary Njie was grateful for the information and said he would not advise President Jammeh right away of the problem. Since the Gambian Embassy in Washington had organized the trip, Njie intimated that their Ambassador Bammy Jagne would write a letter to the Gambian government explaining what had happened. Njie said he would discuss the problem with the President only after receipt of the letter. Despite the sensitivity of the subject, the meeting ended on a very cordial note.

COMMENT

¶10. This surreal episode did not have to happen and was beyond Post's control. Mr. Hines is a private citizen who came to The Gambia on private business. Nevertheless, by posing as a Congressman and meeting with President Jammeh under that pretends, he seriously jeopardized Post's standing in the country. It is clear that as early as Thursday, Hines could have nipped the impression that he was a Congressman in the bud, but was unable or chose not to do so.

¶11. The unfortunate consequence of this incident may be the

scuttling of World Air Leasing's plans to start up a legitimate airline running transatlantic and subregional flights using Banjul airport as a hub. There has been a long list of pretenders to the job (see ref C) and each one has made wild predictions and has not been able to fulfill on any of them. Post will continue to use all of its influence to ensure that legitimate business is not harmed by Hines' charade.

END TEXT OF REFTEL

STAFFORD